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## Survey of Communist Military Developments in Indochina

DIA review(s) completed.

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January 9, 1975

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**SURVEY OF COMMUNIST  
MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA\***

(This report covers the period  
December 19, 1974 - January 8, 1975)

**The Key Points**

- Both Communist and ARVN ammunition expenditures surged during December, but the Communists still are conserving their artillery. A detailed report on the Communist use of their heavy field artillery in South Vietnam during 1974 is at Annex B.

\* This report has been prepared jointly by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.

January 9, 1975

Preface

This report summarizes evidence received during the reporting period of (I) Communist efforts to infiltrate new manpower and military supplies toward and into South Vietnam, (II) significant combat activity, and (III) other developments affecting Communist military capabilities in Indochina.

**DETAILS**

**I. Infiltration and Redeployment of North Vietnamese Personnel  
and Logistic Developments**

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**Comparative Starts of Troops from North Vietnam**

	<u>1972/73</u>	<u>1973/74</u>
Total regular infiltration cycle, Sep 1-Jun 30	94,000	94,500
	<u>1973/74</u>	<u>1974/75</u>
Total regular infiltration starts, Sep 1-Jan 8	39,500	23,500
MR Tri Thien	2,000	5,000
MR 5	2,000	....
B-3 Front	5,000	4,500
COSVN	7,500	6,000
Southern Laos/MR 559	23,000	8,000

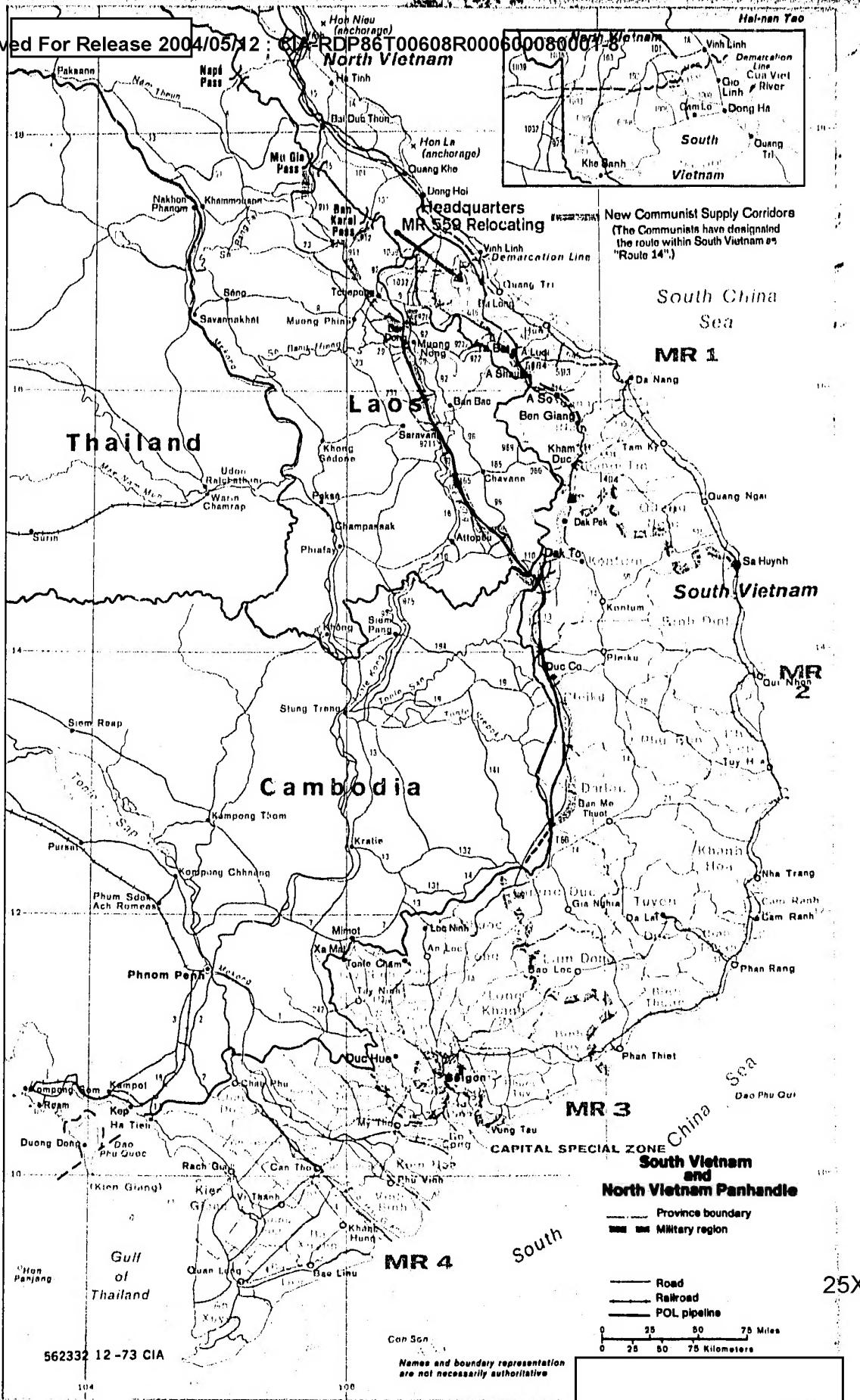
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## II. Combat Activity in South Vietnam

7. There has been a significant increase in fighting in MRs 3 and 4 since mid-December, although the overall level of combat activity in South Vietnam has decreased.

8. In MR 3, the fall of Bo Duc district town on December 22, Tanh Linh and Don Luan district towns on December 25, and Song Be district town on December 31 brings the total number of district towns lost in the current campaign to five. In addition, on January 6, Phuoc Binh, the provincial capital of Phuoc Long Province, succumbed to a coordinated attack by Communist forces, eliminating South Vietnamese military presence in the province. This marks the first provincial capital lost to the Communists since the 1973 cease-fire. Elsewhere, regional forces atop Ba Den Mountain northeast of Tay Ninh City came under heavy ground attack and were forced to evacuate their position because of ARVN inability to resupply. The evacuation of this dominant terrain feature gives Communist forces excellent observation of Tay Ninh City and the surrounding terrain. On January 7, the outskirts of Saigon received a rocket attack, the first such attack since the cease-fire. In Binh Tuy Province, the isolated district town of Hoai Duc remains under heavy pressure. The garrison there has been reinforced by two battalions of the ARVN 18th Division.

9. In MR 4, elements of the ARVN 21st and ARVN 7th Divisions participating in a region-wide operation made contact with Communist forces in late December. More than 500 Communists were reported killed, while ARVN suffered moderate casualties. On January 2, elements of the ARVN 9th Division operating in Kien Giang Province received heavy casualties, including three company commanders killed.

10. In MR 1, light contacts were reported in the vicinity of Mo Tau and Bong Mountains in Thua Thien Province, but neither side is attempting to expand its holdings. As the result of an earlier decision, the withdrawal of ARVN Airborne forces from the Hill 1062 area southwest of Da Nang was completed on January 6. In southern MR 1, two battalions of the ARVN 2d Division were attacked and dispersed by Communist forces on January 1, resulting in 158 ARVN reported missing. In MR 2, elements of the ARVN 22d Division operating in the An Lao Valley made contact with Communist forces on January 2, reportedly resulting in 98 Communists killed and the capture of various weapons, including one 105-mm howitzer. On January 6, NVA forces suffered 102 killed in an attack on elements of the division in the same area.

**III. Other Developments Affecting Communist Military Capabilities in Indochina**

*Communist Force Structure Continues to Change*

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13. [redacted] the North Vietnamese may be forming another division in the area of Phong Dinh and Chuong Thien Provinces of southern

## Communist and South Vietnamese Regular Combat Forces in South Vietnam

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South Vietnam

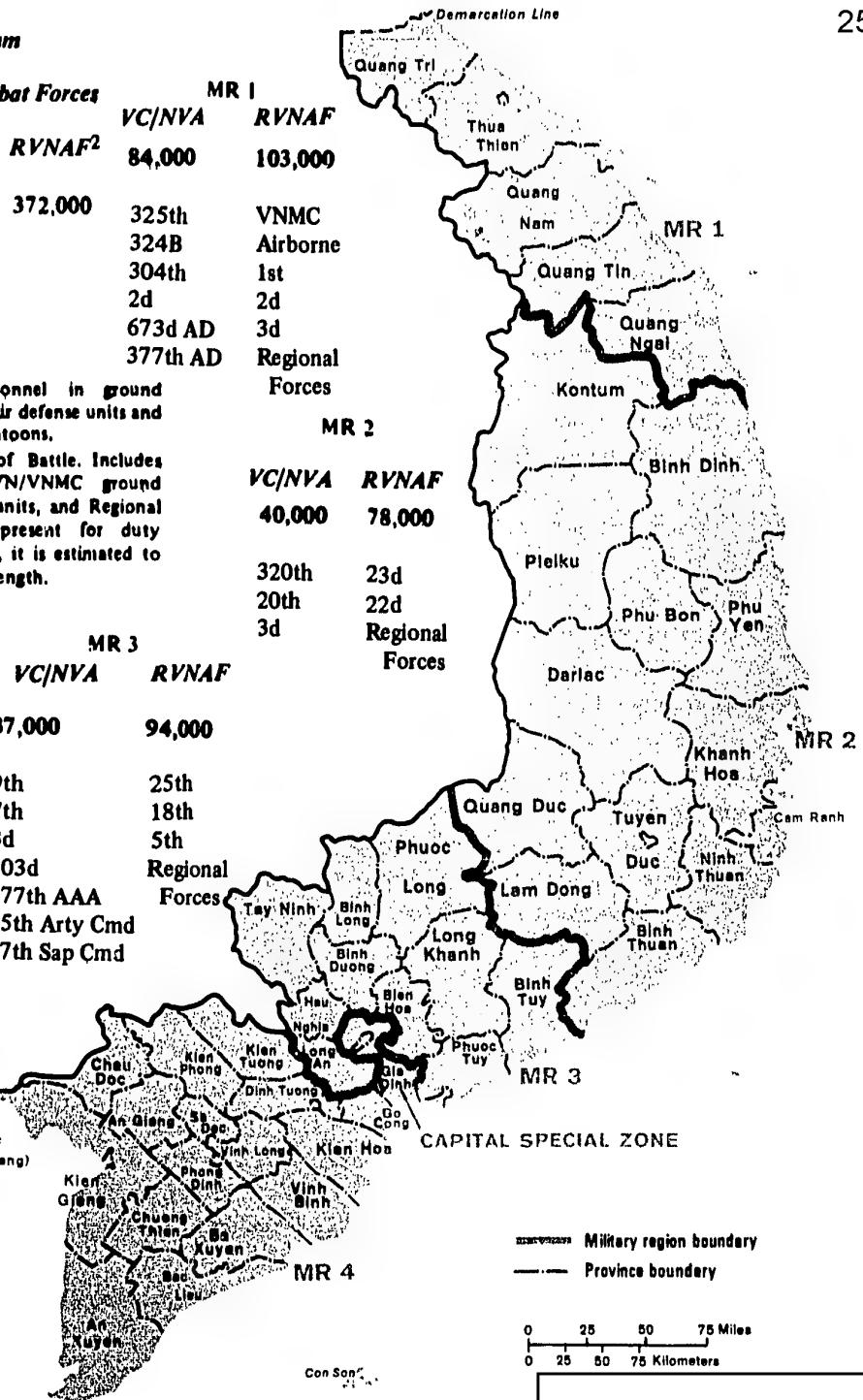
<i><b>Regular Combat Forces</b></i>		<i><b>MR I</b></i>	
<i><b>VC/NVA<sup>1</sup></b></i>	<i><b>RVNAF<sup>2</sup></b></i>	<i><b>VC/NVA</b></i>	<i><b>RVNAF</b></i>
<b>187,000</b>	<b>372,000</b>	<b>84,000</b>	<b>103,000</b>
		325th	VNMC
		324B	Airborne
		304th	1st
		2d	2d
		673d AD	3d
		377th AD	Regional

1. Includes VC/NVA personnel in ground combat, combat support, and air defense units and local force companies and platoons.
  2. RVNAP Ground Order of Battle. Includes assigned personnel in ARVN/VNMC ground combat and combat support units, and Regional Force battalions. Although present for duty strength is no longer available, it is estimated to be about 85% of assigned strength.

<b>VC/NVA</b>	<b>RVN AF</b>
<b>40,000</b>	<b>78,000</b>
320th	23d
20th	22d
3d	Regional Forces

<b>MR 3</b>	<b>VC/NVA</b>	<b>RVNAF</b>
7,000	94,000	
0th	25th	
7th	18th	
d	5th	
03d	Regional	
77th AAA	Forces	
5th Arty Cmd		
7th Sap Cmd		

<b>VC/NVA</b>	<b>RVN AF</b>
<b>26,000</b>	<b>97,000</b>
8th	21st
5th	9th
	7th
	<b>Regional Forces</b>



**Military region boundary**

0      25      50      75 Miles

0 25 50 75 Kilometers

Page 1

10.000-15.000 €

10.000-15.000 €

10.000-15.000 €

For more information about the study, please contact Dr. Michael J. Hwang at (310) 794-3111 or via email at [mhwang@ucla.edu](mailto:mhwang@ucla.edu).

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MR 4. The division reportedly consists of the D-2, 18B, and 95A Independent Infantry Regiments (the latter two were formerly part of the NVA 1st Division which was deactivated in 1973). There is as yet, however, insufficient evidence to confirm the division's existence.

14. By consolidating previously independent regiments into divisional structures, the Communists not only are creating new threat areas but also are increasing the combat effectiveness of their regiments through better command and control. The major improvement will be a better capability to coordinate multi-regimental attacks on selected targets.

#### RVNAF to Reconstitute a Joint General Staff Reserve

15. The South Vietnamese have approved a plan to reconstitute a Joint General Staff (JGS) reserve force in the Saigon area by establishing a new Marine brigade, an Airborne brigade, and a Ranger group - each consisting of three battalions. Two battalions of Marines and Rangers are to be formed immediately and will be operational by February 15, while the third Marine and Ranger battalions will be formed by May 1. The formation of the reserve Airborne brigade originally was scheduled for a later date, but the military situation has prompted the JGS to begin immediately, and the brigade now is scheduled to be operational by April 1.

16. The Marines and Rangers were selected to form new units because both have sufficient officers, NCOs, and recruits on hand to meet the requirement. The new Ranger battalions will be formed at the Ranger Training Center in Khanh Hoa Province, where some 3,000 trainees are presently on hand. The new Marine battalions will be formed by taking one company from each existing Marine battalion. Manning spaces to permit the formation of the new units will be created by deactivating military police battalions and railroad guard units, whose personnel will also help fill out the new units.

17. The Airborne Division, however, depleted by recent losses, will experience more difficulty meeting its manpower requirements for the new brigade. As a result, the JGS has given the Airborne unit top priority to recruit in all South Vietnamese training centers and schools.

18. The lack of a strategic reserve has been a major constraint for South Vietnam. If these units can be equipped and manned quickly and efficiently, they

should help to limit Communist gains during the dry season by giving the JGS more tactical and planning flexibility.

***ARVN and NVA Ammunition Expenditures During December***

19. Both Communist and South Vietnamese ammunition expenditures surged in December, reflecting the outbreak of widespread fighting in the southern half of South Vietnam. Communist expenditures of heavy weapons ammunition in MRs 3 and 4 averaged about 620 rounds daily during the month -- by far the highest expenditure rate in these regions this past year. Despite a sharp drop in firings in MRs 1 and 2, Communist expenditures countrywide increased to 820 rounds daily, about 37% above November's level and one of the higher rates reported this year. ARVN expenditures of artillery ammunition increased even more sharply, reaching 13,910 rounds a day countrywide during December. This figure is about 77% higher than November's expenditures and the second highest monthly average (surpassed only by August) recorded by ARVN in 1974.

20. The high rate of expenditure of artillery ammunition by ARVN during December represents a setback to South Vietnamese supply conservation efforts. These efforts -- initiated in response to military funding cutbacks in late summer -- had begun to show promising results in October and November, as illustrated in the table below.

**Daily ARVN and Communist Ammunition Expenditures  
in South Vietnam, 1974**

					Rounds
	MR 1	MR 2	MR 3	MR 4	Total
<b>ARVN artillery</b>					
Jan-Jun	610	2,640	3,150	3,520	9,920
Jul	1,850	3,110	2,790	2,110	9,860
Aug	4,210	4,150	5,780	1,470	15,610
Sep	4,290	2,190	2,200	1,570	10,250
Oct	3,370	970	990	1,450	6,780
Nov	3,330	1,420	1,430	1,680	7,860
Dec	3,700	1,960	3,880	4,370	13,910
<b>Communist artillery, rocket, recoilless rifle, and mortar</b>					
Jan-Jun	110	90	150	70	420
Jul	540	230	160	110	1,040
Aug	860	340	200	60	1,460
Sep	870	70	130	80	1,150
Oct	660	90	80	70	900
Nov	430	60	40	70	600
Dec	170	30	480	140	820

21. Despite the increase in combat in December, the share of artillery rounds among Communist heavy weapons expenditures remained low. Only about 25 artillery rounds per day were fired during the month, equivalent to about one artillery shell for every 30 heavy weapons rounds expended. This share has remained fairly constant throughout 1974, contrasting with a much higher rate of artillery expenditure during the 1972 offensive. This conservative use of artillery ammunition by Communist forces in South Vietnam is discussed at length in Annex B.

#### *October HES Results*

25. Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) reporting showed little overall change in the population control situation in South Vietnam during October, despite increasing security problems in the Delta. This contrasts with earlier reports of

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a more marked decline in security in the region during the month. As of the end of October, about 79% of the country's population was living in government-controlled areas - virtually the same proportion as a month earlier. MRs 2 and 3 registered very slight increases in government control during the period, MR 4 declined only marginally, and MR 1 remained the same.

26. There were no dramatic shifts in the control situation at the provincial level during October. The greatest government gains were made in Quang Ngai, Phu Yen, and Tay Ninh Provinces, but the largest of these was less than seven percentage points. On the negative side, the greatest decrease occurred in sparsely populated Quang Tin, where an upsurge in military activity occurred.

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**ANNEX B****COMMUNIST CONSERVATION OF ARTILLERY AMMUNITION**

One noteworthy aspect of Communist ammunition expenditures in 1974 has been a reluctance on the part of the Communists to use their artillery. Even during the periodic highpoints and extended periods of heavy fighting in region-wide areas, firings of artillery ammunition have remained relatively low. This pattern of artillery fire has distinct implications for Communist military capabilities and tactical plans in South Vietnam.

A comparison of Communist expenditures of heavy weapons ammunition in 1974 with those during the 1972 offensive demonstrates dramatically that the Communists have been conserving their artillery far more than their other heavy weapons.\* In 1974, Communist forces in South Vietnam reportedly expended an average of 685 rounds of mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle ammunition per day -- only slightly fewer than the 730 rounds daily reportedly fired during the first six months (April through September) of the 1972 offensive. In sharp contrast, the Communists fired only about 25 artillery rounds a day in 1974, while during the initial six months of the 1972 offensive they reportedly expended an average of 385 artillery rounds daily. The Communists therefore fired only about one artillery round in every 30 heavy weapons rounds in 1974, while in 1972 about one in every three rounds was artillery.

The decline in the relative share of artillery ammunition in the mix of Communist heavy weapons expenditures is directly reflected in the estimated tonnages of all types of ground ammunition fired by Communist forces. Because artillery ammunition is the heaviest in the Communists' inventory, the difference in the tonnages fired in 1974 and 1972 is much greater than the difference in total rounds. During 1974 the Communists fired an estimated average of 10 tons a day, while in the period April through September 1972 an estimated 60 tons of all ground ammunition were expended. The table below illustrates the comparative rates of Communist expenditures in 1974 and during the 1972 offensive.

**In addition to**

**artillery, Communist heavy weapons include mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles.**

**Daily Communist Ammunition Expenditures in South Vietnam**

	<b>Mortar, Rocket, Recoilless Rifle (Rounds)</b>	<b>Artillery (Rounds)</b>	<b>Total Heavy Weapons (Rounds)</b>	<b>Artillery (Percent)</b>	<b>Total Ammunition (Tons)</b>
Apr-Sep 1972	730	385	1,115	35	60
Jun-Dec 1974	685	25	710	4	10

The relatively low percentage of artillery expenditures in 1974 did not change during either the July-September or the December surge in combat activity. During the three months of July, August, and September, Communist forces reportedly expended artillery ammunition at an average rate of 40 rounds a day, while firing mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles at the rate of 1,170 rounds a day -- still equivalent to about one artillery round in every 30 rounds of heavy weapons ammunition expended. This pattern again held true in December, when Communist forces fired an average of 25 artillery and 795 mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle rounds a day. In contrast, during the period July through September 1972 -- in which the peak three-month expenditures level was reported that year -- the Communists fired an average of 540 artillery and 910 mortar, rocket, and recoilless rifle rounds a day -- a little more than one artillery in every three heavy weapons rounds. The following table summarizes these expenditures.

**Daily Communist Ammunition Expenditures in South Vietnam**

	<b>Mortar, Rocket, Recoilless Rifle (Rounds)</b>	<b>Artillery (Rounds)</b>	<b>Total Heavy Weapons (Rounds)</b>	<b>Artillery (Percent)</b>
Jul-Sep 1972	910	540	1,450	37
Jul-Sep 1974	1,170	40	1,210	3
Dec 1974	795	25	820	3

The Communists' decision to keep their artillery guns under wraps apparently is based on a combination of considerations. The overriding factor probably is that the Communists' limited military objectives in 1974 required greater use of lighter and shorter range weapons. In addition, the conservation of artillery probably is linked to the Communists' timetable for completion of training in the use of artillery and combined arms now being conducted in North Vietnam and in some areas of South Vietnam.

More important is the obvious implication -- considering the Communists' massive ammunition stockpiles and their low rate of consumption of artillery ammunition -- that the North Vietnamese in 1974 were conserving their artillery for use at a later date. If the artillery is finally unleashed on a countrywide basis, the intensity of Communist shellings would be far greater than that observed in 1974, and probably at least as intense as the heavy barrages received in 1972. This intensive use of firepower could be critical, particularly considering the Communists' ability to exert heavy pressure on ARVN forces this past year without it.

There are some recent indications that the Communists may now be departing somewhat from their pattern of conservative use of artillery. ARVN defenders at Phuoc Binh in MR 3 reported increasingly intensive barrages of heavy weapons ammunition -- including 130-mm artillery rounds -- during the first week of January. The use of 130-mm artillery is the first reported in MR 3 since June 1974. Moreover, the Communists reportedly fired 20 rounds of 122-mm artillery into the district capital of Tuyen Nhon in Kien Tuong Province (northeastern MR 4) on December 18 -- the first indication of Communist use of this weapon in the Delta.